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STATE DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2016

TAGS: PHUM KDEM SOCI CU

SUBJECT: CUBA FREES POLITICAL DETAINEE, LETS 3 OTHERS LEAVE
ISLAND

Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: The Cuban Government freed political detainee Ricardo Medina Salabarria on October 25 after holding him without charge for more than 15 months. Medina, head of the religious affairs committee of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), was taken into custody after his family posted a sign on its balcony stating, "Freedom for Political Prisoners." Meanwhile, the Cuban Government has quietly issued "white cards," granting exit permission, to two dissidents on conditional probation. Mario Enrique Mayo and Julio Antonio Valdes Guevara are among the 75 activists who were jailed in March 2003. They intend to migrate. Another dissident, independent journalist Richard Rosello, has also received exit permission. The issuance of three white cards in short succession, followed by the freeing of a political detainee, could mean that some in the regime are interested in reform or liberalization. More probably, we are seeing signs of a schizophrenic system under severe strain. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (C) Cuban dissident Ricardo Medina Salabarria, an Orthodox Catholic priest, won freedom October 25 after doing hard time at two police stations, a detention center and two maximum-security prisons. He was taken into custody on June 22, 2005 during a crackdown that followed a rare protest outside the French Embassy. At the time, a sign on Medina's balcony stated, "Freedom for Political Prisoners; The Homeland Belongs to All." Medina, a trained nurse who lost his job after his ideological fallout with the GOC, largely lost the ability to speak during his time in prison, due to a vocal-chord cyst that went untreated. His wife, Katia Martin, and their twin daughters were subjected to repeated "acts of repudiation" while Medina was in prison. Martin told us October 27 that she thinks her husband was released because he was threatening to stage a hunger strike.

¶3. (C) Meanwhile, the Cuban Government has quietly granted exit permission to two high-profile dissidents. Mario Enrique Mayo and Julio Antonio Valdes, among the 75 pro-democracy activists jailed in a March 2003 crackdown (and subsequently freed on health grounds), have both received "white cards," enabling them to travel overseas. Mayo, an attorney from Camaguey, was probationed in December 2005 after carving the words "liberty" and "innocent" into his face, abdomen and forearms. His wife has migrated to the United States, and Mayo told us he planned to join her there. Valdes, a veteran dissident from southern Granma province, told us he too intends to migrate north. A third dissident who is not among the 75, independent journalist Richard Rosello, has also received exit permission.

PARMLY